



Wal-Mart Assault Points to Need For "Danger Awareness"

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The recent assault of a woman in a Wal-Mart parking lot (as reported in Courier News, April 14, 2007) brings the importance of "Danger Awareness" to the forefront of women's safety issues in the River Valley. Broad daylight wasn't enough of a deterrent for this assailant, as he sought to force his way into her vehicle, threw the woman through the ground, and made off with her purse. Had he entered her vehicle, things could have potentially been worse.

Russellville is becoming a "big city" and with that comes (unfortunately) big city problems, including crime. In a nation where women are increasingly targeted, being "danger aware" is an important defensive mechanism every woman should use. Shoppers are often distracted as they enter or leave a shopping center, and parking lots are becoming increasingly popular targets for predators looking for victims. By following a few simple safety tips, women can better minimize their risk of becoming a victim.

Shop during daylight hours and park as close as you can to the front of the business. You are less likely to be targeted in a crowd of people, as predators seek "windows of opportunity" to isolate a victim to accomplish their task. Shopping with a friend or relative is also helpful, as there is safety in numbers.

Practice "danger awareness" as you enter and leave a parking lot. Put yourself in the predator's role and avoid placing your vehicle (and yourself) in areas that might isolate you from others and make you more vulnerable. Don't park near vans, as predators often lay in wait for women to approach, pull them into the side door of a van, and speed away.

Walk confidently, keeping aware of the people in front of you, behind you, and to your sides. Don't get into the habit of walking with your head down, or be digging through your purse or bags as you approach your vehicle. Have your keys in hand before you leave the store and be observant as you leave. Make sure you are not being followed, and that you are not isolated in an empty parking lot, especially at night.

As you approach your car, look around it, under it, and make sure no one is hiding or waiting for you. Also, look into the vehicles around your car to make sure no one is waiting for you to return. If you are uncomfortable approaching your car alone, turn around and return to the store. It's okay to ask a store employee or store manager to accompany you to your vehicle.

Keep your purse held tightly against your body, with the flap facing toward you. Don't carry a large number of bags; use a shopping cart. If you are approached, you can push the cart into the predator and run the other way. If you are using a shopping cart, don't put your purse in the cart; keep it close to your body so it can't be easily snatched.

When shopping, don't flash large amounts of cash or wear expensive jewelry. If using a debit or credit card, be aware cell phone cameras and other small hidden cameras can be used to take pictures of your card (or you entering your PIN) and this can be used to steal your identity.

John Terry is a NSA Women-Safe consultant, a martial arts instructor, and a Chaplain with the Christian Black Belt Association. He offers a series of free informational workshops on "Danger Awareness" for church, civic, or community groups to help educate women of all ages on important safety issues. These one-hour workshops highlight potential risks to women and pro-active steps they can take to minimize becoming a victim. For more information, or to schedule a workshop, contact John at 479-968-1708 or rivalleykidsafe@imga.com.